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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHBPCOM/USNS COMFORT PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHBVJXP/COMPHIBRON SIX PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000443

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: CPCS RAN OUT OF PRAYERS OR MONEY?

REF: A. MANAGUA 37

[1](#)B. 2008 MANAGUA 1343

Classified By: Amb. Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 2, 2009, after more than 210 days of illegally occupying Managua's key traffic rotundas to prevent opposition rallies, the "Prayer Against Hatred - Love is Stronger than Hate" faux religious protest ran out of prayers (see Reftel A and B). The campaign showed signs of fatigue on February 13 when several "volunteers" who had been recruited from the shanty town of alleged victims of poisoning from the agro-chemical "Nemagon" staged a protest near the National Assembly to complain that their promised wages and food subsidies had suddenly stopped. After this protest, the number of "prayer volunteers" dramatically fell from 30 per rotunda to four or five "true believers;" and shade tents, sound systems and statues of the Virgin Mary started to be removed from some rotundas. Finally, during the night of April 2, the last shade tents were taken down and the portable toilets removed from the rotundas. The expensive propaganda effort by First Lady Rosario Murillo and her Citizen Power Council (CPCs) cronies may have become a victim of the GON's austerity measures or falling political support within the government. END SUMMARY

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EVOLUTION OF A PRAYER CAMPAIGN
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[1](#)2. (C) As reported previously (see Ref B), First Lady Rosario Murillo and the CPCs began their campaign to occupy the key Managua rotundas 24/7 on August 26, 2008, well in advance of the November 9, 2008 municipal elections. The campaign was billed as a "spontaneous religious movement" by its participants and government spokespeople; however, it is difficult to explain why a spontaneous movement would have so much government support, including Murillo's signature pink and yellow graphic and CPC symbols on all of its banners.

[1](#)3. (C) The occupation was declared illegal by Managua's then Mayor Dionisio Marenco, and it was a clear violation Nicaraguan election laws; however, police were never ordered to remove "religious" protesters who waved Nicaraguan flags and wore white tee-shirts with slogans in bright pink letters "Prayer Against Hatred - Love is Stronger than Hate." During the post election violence, prayer "volunteers" were frequently joined by hundreds of Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) supporters, waving red and black FSLN-flags, who were called to the streets by party leaders to "defend the vote." During the post election melee, statues of the Virgin Mary were installed overnight by the GON without the Catholic Church's permission (see Reftel A).

[1](#)4. (C) After the final election results were announced on November 20, 2008 the "Love Against Hate" prayer campaign evolved into a quasi-Christmas celebration when the GON installed large 30-feet tall metal poles with strings of Christmas lights in major rotundas. Volunteer banner slogans changed from "Prayer Against Hatred" to "Singing For Love - Completing God's Work." When the Christmas holidays ended, the prayer campaign evolved into a pre-celebration of the 30-year anniversary of the Sandinista revolution, when electric "30" lights were suddenly installed on the top of each pole, replacing the traditional star of Bethlehem. (NOTE: The 30-year anniversary of the Sandinista revolution arriving in Managua will be celebrated on July 19, 2009. END NOTE).

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RUNNING OUT OF PRAYERS - OR MONEY?
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[1](#)5. (C) On February 13, 2009 a group of alleged survivors of poisonings from &Nemagon,8 a pesticide formerly used here, who had been hired by t

[1](#)6. (C) Following the protests, the number of prayer volunteers fell dramatically around Managua, from as many as 30 per rotunda down to four or five. Media also reported that shade tents, sound systems and Virgin Mary statues were suddenly removed from some of the rotundas. On February 15, 2009 media reported that some of the protesters had fled the Nemagon shanty town after receiving death threats from CPCs for going public with their complaints. On March 16, another group of 36 former prayer volunteers staged a protest in front the FSLN headquarters, demanding 36,000 Cordobas (\$1,800 USD) in unpaid wages for working six months. A FSLN representative told the group that Ortega was not familiar with the situation and asked for a formal letter with their demands.

[1](#)7. (C) Finally on April 2, 2009 under cover of darkness, the last shade tents and portable toilets were removed from the rotundas. All that was left of the 210-day occupation were piles of garbage, old tires, and bare earth where the original grass had been trampled by the prayer volunteers.

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COMMENT
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18. (C) There was never anything spontaneous (or for that matter religious) about the "Prayer Against Hate" campaign launched by First Lady Rosario Murillo and her CPC forces. It was always a cold and calculated plan to occupy high-value symbolic Managua real estate to pre-empt opposition protests, veiled under the cloak of a faux religious movement. Disguising it as a religious movement may have been an attempt to garner sympathy or at least make it awkward for the police and courts to shut it down without the threat of being denounced for persecuting religious people. However, the fingerprints of Murillo's propaganda machine were all over the "spontaneous" campaign, which evolved in purpose the longer it remained in the Managua rotundas.

19. (C) As long as there was an adequate bank account to pay for "volunteers," perhaps coming from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the campaign could continue. Nevertheless, the falling price of Venezuelan oil and the reluctance of the traditional donor community to continue direct budget support to the GON after the massive election fraud seem to have dried up the funds for continuing the effort. But shutting it down is a Catch-22 for the FSLN, in that with paid volunteers finally leaving the Rotundas, the opposition could start to occupy them again for protests against proposed constitutional reforms that could allow President Ortega to be re-elected. Moreover, it will be much harder politically to start a "Prayer Against Hatred II" sequel, and there may not be enough "true believers" within the CPCs or FSLN party who are willing to maintain this 24/7 vigil without remuneration.

CALLAHAN